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ABSTRACT

The role and status of English instruction in Iraq is outlined. The role of English in Iraq as a whole, English instruction within the educational system, teacher qualifications, instructional materials, English instruction outside the educational system, British and American support for English instruction in Iraq, and the status of English literature are reported. English is taught as a second language from fifth grade through secondary school and is the language of instruction in technical subjects at the university level. The major weaknesses of English instruction in Iraq are the poor training of primary level teachers and the limited availability of British and American publications. (RW)

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE

December 1979

Country: IRAQ

FL 013 742

1. Role of English

1.1 The official language of Iraq is Arabic, but a large minority of the 12 million population speak Kurdish, and there are smaller groups speaking Farsi, Assyrian, Chaldean, Turkish or Turkoman and Armenian. Turkish ceased to be the language of government after the First World War, when English established itself in the schools and became the second language of the ruling and educated classes. The rapid growth of education in the last twenty years together with pan-Arab aspirations and the Government's recent decision to make Arabic the language of instruction in all University undergraduate courses means that English no longer has the status of a second language, especially as the school system was Arabised some years ago. English is now the most important foreign language.

1.2 Within the country, English is no longer used as a means of communication except in the medical world, in parts of the oil industry and in the newer specialisations, e.g. computers. It is virtually the sole language of international communication in trade, diplomacy, industry, technology and science, and of access to research in all fields of learning.

1.3 English is used in the emerging postgraduate courses in Iraqi universities. It is also considered important for those scholarship holders hoping to gain postgraduate places overseas. The United Nations Agencies all insist on high standards of English before allocating study awards. Indeed, they have recently stopped all WHO-financed pre-course language training, which forces candidates to score very highly on the Davies Test.

1.4 English is now learnt by every Iraqi child in school from the fifth year of education until the end of secondary school. In higher education English was, at least in theory, the language of instruction and examination in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, engineering, science and veterinary science. In practice, there was always a transition to Arabic for some of the lecturing and for most of the practical work in most subjects. Since October, 1976, all entrants to all faculties have been officially taught and examined in Arabic. The only exception was in the field of medicine. A decree issued in December 1979 has made Arabic the official language of instruction for all first-year medical students.

2. English within the Educational System

2.1 Primary level

2.1.1 The primary school course lasts 6 years, children normally entering the system at the age of six. In the year 1977/78 there were 8,387 primary schools in Iraq, with a total primary school

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population of 2,048,566, of which girls formed approximately 33%. Enrolment varies considerably between urban and rural districts: in Baghdad virtually 100% , in rural areas often under 40%. Repeater and drop-out rates are high, especially in the first two years.

2.1.2 English is begun at the beginning of the fifth year, with 6 periods a week, although 'model schools' begin earlier, normally in the third year. The prescribed text book for every child is the New English Course for Iraq, produced by the Institute for the Development of English Language Teaching in Iraq (IDELTI). The books are oral in approach, and in the earlier years, based on the structural method, although there are signs of a more communicative approach in the last two books which, of course, were written relatively recently. Book 8, the final book, will be in the schools in September, 1980. The general opinion seems to be that children are more fluent in spoken English than was the case with the previous text books in use.

2.2 Secondary level

2.2.1 Secondary education is divided into two stages:

(i) Intermediate - 3 year course
(ii) Preparatory - 3 year course

At secondary preparatory level a degree of specialisation is introduced, the main concentration being on science or literature. In addition, there are a lesser number of technical agricultural and commercial vocational schools. In the year 1977/78 there were 1,384 academic secondary schools (scientific or literary) with a school enrolment of 664,297, of whom 29.6% were girls. The total enrolment at the 93 vocational schools was 35,188.

2.2.2 The number of English periods a week at secondary level is as follows:

Intermediate	1	6	periods
"	2	5	"
"	3	5	"
Secondary	1	5	"
"	2	5	" (scientific), 6 (literary)
"	3	5	" ("), 6 (").

The reason why scientific classes have fewer periods of English is attributed to the fact that the pupils are, generally speaking, more able, including ability in English, than those in the literary classes. Both sections sit for the same ministry examinations in English and most other subjects.

2.2.3 A pilot scheme for comprehensive education has been established with the decision to create four comprehensive schools in the country. Head teachers have been selected and visited Sweden and U.K. in 1977. Three schools were opened in September, 1979.

2.3 Tertiary level

2.3.1 In the country's six universities, to which 27,400 first year students were admitted in September, 1978, the typical pattern of formal English teaching outside the English section of the Department of Foreign Languages in a College of Arts or College of Education is one course of 2-4 hours per week for the first two years of a 4 or 5 year undergraduate course. At the non-formal level, one subject course per semester in science and technology will be taught through the medium of English. This arrangement also accommodates the many non-Arab contract teachers. Service English is the responsibility of lecturers from the College of Arts or College of Education who have, in the past, regarded it as an unrewarding and unpopular chore. However, there has been a slight change in attitude recently with a growing awareness at the University of Basrah of ESP, the introduction of such text books as the 'Nucleus' and 'Focus' series and seminars and demonstration lessons devoted to ESP. Furthermore at the University of Mosul a 2 year MA course in TEFL with special reference to the teaching of English for Science and Technology was initiated in October, 1977. Since then, an MA (TEFL) has been started at the University of Basrah with an initial intake, in February, 1978, of 4 students, and there is news that the University of Baghdad is contemplating beginning an MA course in Translation.

2.3.2 Great emphasis is being placed on the growth of technical and vocational education by the Foundation of Technical Institutes. The Foundation co-ordinates the administration of various institutes of technology, pharmacy, textiles, fine arts, agriculture and medical technology. These institutes offer a two-year diploma course. Their aim is to produce middle level technicians. English is taught in both years for three 50 minute periods per week. A Maritime Academy for training naval and merchant navy deck, engineering and communications officers has been established at Basrah. English is taught for 3-4 hours per week for two years.

2.3.3 University English Departments tend to attract only those students whose examination results were not good enough to secure entrance to the more prestigious scientific colleges and their command of English on entry tends to be proportionally weaker. There is a growing awareness of the need to increase language expertise at the expense of the study of literature, (reading lists for Baghdad University and the University of Al Mustansiriyah are available in ELMD).

2.3.4 In 1976 there was considerable anxiety in the Colleges of Arts concerning the continuance of their existence. The majority of students who wished to study English were being channelled into Colleges of Education. The Colleges of Arts have replied by introducing English for Translation, Business and Commerce and by trying, recently, to maintain their right to provide service English to other faculties. The University of Al-Mustansiriyah now has a separate translation section within the Language Department, with its own Head of Department. Al Mustansiriyah University also has its own Institute of Modern Languages with its own Director, a member of the English Department. It intends to offer courses in six modern languages to those who hope or intend to travel abroad for further studies.

2.4 Eradication of illiteracy campaign

The 1977 Population Census revealed an illiteracy rate of 19.6% of the country's population, totalling 2,354,225 in the 15-45 age bracket. A massive eradication campaign, using Draconian methods of motivation, was instigated by the then President of the Republic. Those who do well in the campaign are allowed to go on to basic studies which include English and for this purpose a new book has been created by the Institute for the Development of English Language Teaching in Iraq which covers most of the primary school syllabus and material at a rapid pace.

2.5 Examinations and syllabuses

2.5.1 There are now two Baccalaureate examinations, the First Primary Baccalaureate examination having been abolished in 1977. The remaining two public examinations, set centrally by the Ministry of Education, are taken at the end of the third year intermediate and at the end of the third year secondary. The English syllabus is in effect the New English Course. In addition to the Ministry examinations a mid-year examination is held every year at the beginning of February and there are also monthly tests. The results of the mid-year examinations and monthly tests determine promotion to the next class. The Secondary Baccalaureate determines entry to the universities and other forms of tertiary education.

2.5.2 At present the examinations in English are somewhat unrealistic and tend to lead to a form of teaching that concentrates on "spotting" the typical examination question. However, reforms for the Baccalaureate exams are under way, although they have been postponed more than once. The new format will involve a revised paper consisting of guided composition, a comprehension passage and structure and lexis tested by multiple choice questions. The new Intermediate Baccalaureate was introduced in 1978 and the Secondary will be introduced in 1981.

3. Teaching Cadre

3.1 Although the teaching cadre is almost wholly Iraqi at primary and secondary schools, there are large numbers of Egyptian teachers and an increasing number of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi teachers in tertiary education since British Council recruitment, operating in 1974/75, 1975/76, 1976/77, was discontinued because of unsatisfactory living conditions. Currently there are a few western native speakers of English, including one Englishman at the University of Mosul, one Australian at Baghdad and one Englishman in Basrah, all recruited by the universities themselves.

3.2 At the primary level, teachers have generally had very little pre-service professional training. But in the year 1977, 36 new primary Training Colleges were opened in an attempt to give more systematic training. There is unfortunately no specialisation available for the training of English teachers in these colleges. In the school system, however, more teachers are beginning to teach English exclusively. Generally speaking, the standard of primary school English teachers is low.

3.3 At the secondary level, English teachers are overwhelmingly graduates of the Colleges of Education or the Colleges of Arts. The

Colleges of Education are assuming a greater importance and are becoming heavily politicised, as are the primary Training Colleges. The calibre of secondary school teachers of English is at present very much higher than that of their primary counterparts.

3.4 In-service training of English teachers is taken seriously. There are two main vehicles for such training. First, IDELTI has for a number of years run in-service courses for large numbers of both primary and secondary school teachers, on courses ranging from one to six months' duration. This has tended to favour teachers in Baghdad. (For a fuller report on the activities of IDELTI see Assistant Dean (Technical)'s annual post reports for 1975, 1976 & 1977).

The second method of providing in-service courses, especially for English teachers in the Governorates, is by means of locally-run courses. These are directed by 'trainer-leaders', a specially selected group of mainly 'excellent' secondary school teachers who underwent a six months' course at IDELTI to fit them for the role of local teachers. The scheme has now got off the ground and appears promising.

4. Teaching Materials

4.1 The New English Course for Iraq, produced by IDELTI, is in use in all schools in the country. At the time of writing, all eight books have been produced, catering for primary 5-6, intermediate 1-3 and secondary 1-2 class. The book for the third year secondary is in press. Tapes are available to accompany all the books written so far, and it is proposed to produce visual aids as well, although this project has not progressed very far. In addition, new text-books have been written by IDELTI for the vocational and technical secondary schools.

4.2 Books for university courses are bought from European and American publishers through the university bookshops. However, a very recent development has been the establishment of book-writing committees to produce text-books for Iraqi university courses. A very great deal of plagiarising has occurred. Genuine academics view the development with contempt but the political climate favours all home-produced courses and the authors are paid well. There is a strong directive to centralise on syllabuses and most have now been fully centralised.

4.3 University libraries are, on the whole, poorly stocked. Central libraries have the capacity to fulfil needs but the logistics of ordering, cataloguing and accessioning causes constant problems. On the whole, university students study their text-books and nothing else. Most of the universities have language laboratories which are well used. The existence of departmental libraries is frowned on by chief librarians but they seem to flourish.

5. English outside the Educational System

There is only one commercial organisation in Baghdad which teaches English. The Al-Kindy Institute. It is owned by a driving school proprietor. Standards are abysmally low. A driving school in Hilla, near Babylon, has also recently advertised English classes.

Some commercial and government firms have English classes for their employees. The teachers are usually university lecturers working unofficially.

6. British Support for the Teaching of English

6.1 Dr Brian Tiffen left Iraq in the summer of 1978 and with his departure the post of Assistant Dean (Technical) at IDELTI ceased to operate as a British-funded post. Under the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the British Council/Ministry of Education on October 1, 1978, ELO devotes 15% of his time to advisory and consultancy work at IDELTI. The current agreement is due for reassessment on 30 September 1980 and ends 30 September 1981. The Council puts its sound studio at the disposal of IDELTI staff and ELO organises the taping of material used in Books 6-8 of the Secondary School Course. Two scholarships are offered annually in ELT for IDELTI nominees.

6.2 The British Council is not, at present, able to recruit staff for Iraq because of the terms of agreement of the contract. At present there are 2 British lecturers in Iraq, recruited directly by the universities through their Cultural Attache in London.

6.3 ELO tours extensively and has an ongoing programme of ESP advisory work at Basrah University consisting of orientation seminars, syllabus design, demonstration lessons and committee work. He also advises the cultural centre on extra-curricular classes for postgraduates hoping to study overseas. He also gives seminars to the M.A. students in methodology and psycholinguistics.

ELO has drawn up the MA (TEFL) programme for the University of Mosul and will advise on its implementation. He also gives some lectures as part of the course. ELO also gives seminars to staff and students at Al-Mustansiriyah University.

6.4 The Council's Centre of English Studies DTE programme has expanded from 400 students to over 1,000 at present. A large building programme has been completed, new classroom furniture and A/V aids have been introduced, including a sound and video studio; locally-engaged British teachers have been trained. There is an establishment of a London-recruited DOS, ADOS (special groups) and Lecturer, plus a locally-engaged ADOS (mixed groups). There are also over 25 locally-engaged fee-paid British teachers. In addition to the 1,000 general class students, E.S.P. courses are constantly being organised and operated for a variety of ministries, State organisations and the U.N. Students for the mixed groups are drawn mostly from those holding postgraduate scholarships for overseas, from government organisations, ministries, institutions, universities and, to a lesser extent, from business and commerce.

7. American support for the Teaching of English

7.1 As diplomatic ties between America and Iraq, broken off in 1967, have not been renewed, there is no American support from ELT.

7.2 The ETS examinations, TOEFL, GRE, etc., formerly run by the British Council, have been handed back to the American Interests Section of the Belgian Embassy who now administer them on British Council premises.

8. The British Council administers the Davies Test on behalf of the New Zealand Embassy. It also administers the Australian State Department English Language Proficiency Examination on behalf of the Australian Government, testing the proficiency of prospective postgraduates.

9. General Statement

9.1 The main weakness in the present ELT situation is the poor training and performance of primary school teachers and the lack of ready access to British or American books, magazines or newspapers because of the system of import licensing and official censorship. However, the IDELTI trainer-leader scheme is one of the best hopes for the future of English in the school system, especially if the regional training sessions continue.

9.2 The educational explosion in science and technology at the academic industrial and commercial level has made people even more aware of the need for English for international communication and for research and further study. The Arabisation of undergraduate programmes has had the beneficial effect of sharpening people's awareness of the need for ESP programmes. It has stimulated university departments' demands in their English Department, and made the departments aware of the need to change their existing programmes.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE

LITERATURE ANNEXE Iraq December 1979

1. Status of Literature

English Literature is regarded as a foreign literature and formerly had high status. In recent years it has been viewed with a certain amount of suspicion because of the cultural content. The result has been that socialist writers get more than their fair share of attention.

The English departments of the Colleges of Arts have survived a recent crisis of survival and are now reasonably strong again. Literature is also taught alongside language and methodology in the university Colleges of Education.

2. Literary Education

2.1 Children begin reading re-written simplified classics in fourth and fifth years of their English course in the state system.

2.2 English literature can be taken at the British Council (rarely by school leavers).

2.3 There is no professional association of teachers of English.

2.4 N.A.

2.5 There are approximately 30-40 students in each year group at the four universities which offer a BA in English.

2.6 There is one postgraduate course in Iraq where students specialise in English literature. Recent MA theses have dealt with Doris Lessing; Theatre of the Absurd; the influence of the Arab World in 16th Century British drama. There is usually some comparative literary component in most of these.

3. Literary Scene

3.1 No local writers work in English although there is a good deal of translation from English to Arabic. Arabic literature is taught in the school system.

3.2 There is no local publishing of British literature. There are four or five excellent translators of British works. A recent translation was of Arden's 'Sergeant Musgrave's Dance' and 'The Work-house Donkey' both of which were presented to the author through the British Council.

3.3 As mentioned in para. 9.1, there is a grave shortage of texts of all kinds of English, not only ELT and literature.

The reasons for this are official censorship and import licensing.